



# Highway 51/29 Corridor

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why rebuild Highway 51/29 corridor?**

The Highway 51/29 corridor is a vital element of central Wisconsin's transportation network. The corridor is important to the economic health of the State of Wisconsin, Marathon County and the Wausau area.

Highway 51 was declared a freeway in 1963 and constructed to its present configuration during the late 1960s. Typically, a roadway is designed to function for 20 or 30 years prior to being reconstructed. The current Highway 51/29 configuration is near the end of its useful life. Expansion of the corridor is necessary to meet the needs of the traveling public for the next 30 years.

Traffic volumes on this segment of Highway 51/29 are increasing at one of the highest rates in the State. Originally, in the late 1960s, approximately 8,500 vehicles per day traveled the corridor. Currently, more than 56,000 vehicles use this corridor each day with traffic volumes expected to grow to more than 115,000 vehicles per day by 2030.

The current Highway 51/29 configuration is not capable of handling the increased volumes of traffic. If the corridor is not improved, congestion will continue to increase and long-distance travelers along with local commuters will look for alternative routes to avoid this area.

### **Why is Highway 29 not routed south of Rib Mountain onto the Marathon County N corridor?**

This alternative has been discussed for more than a decade and was investigated during the environmental phase of this project. Although this route would remove Highway 29 traffic from the Highway 51 corridor, the disadvantages are significant:

- Environmental impacts: Severance of the Rib River wetland complex would significantly affect this high quality natural area
- Traffic remaining on the Highway 51 corridor would still require a six-lane facility
- Counterproductive to Smart Growth Planning
- This option poses a significant increase in construction costs

### **Why not build Highway 51 east of Wausau and leave existing Highway 51/29 as a business route?**

An eastern corridor has been studied since the 1970s as part of the Grand Avenue studies. This corridor could potentially add a high-speed route for traffic destined outside the Wausau area while maintaining the existing corridor for local commuters.

This option is not sufficient to justify the adverse environmental impacts and additional construction costs. The primary disadvantages include:

- Significant impact on wetlands and agricultural lands
- Would require an additional crossing of the Wisconsin River, north of Wausau
- Hundreds of acres of additional property necessary for new right-of-way
- Topographic features lessen desirability of corridor
- Significant distance from Wausau Central Business District - require the corridor be located east of Camp Phillips Road near Marathon County J.
- Counterproductive to the Smart Growth Planning



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### **Why improve both the Highway 51/29 corridor and the local arterial system?**

The future growth of the Wausau area is dependant on a transportation system that promotes long-distance travel on the Highway 51/29 corridor while maintaining accessibility to area businesses and residences. As development of the surrounding area continues, traffic volumes are expected to increase on the Highway 51/29 corridor to levels currently experienced on freeways within the Milwaukee Metropolitan area.

Improvements to the local arterial system will:

- Provide local traffic with alternative routes during periods of congestion on the Highway 51/29 corridor
- Enhance safety along the corridor by limiting increased traffic volumes on the Highway 51/29 corridor and by limiting increased traffic volumes entering or exiting at interchange ramps
- Provide alternative routes for motorists and emergency services if traffic disruptions on Highway 51/29 is closed for traffic disruptions
- Provide alternative routes for traffic during construction and future maintenance of the Highway 51/29 corridor; approximately 30 percent of traffic needs to be diverted onto the local arterial system during these operations to maintain traffic flow in the corridor
- Provide alternative routes for roadways located too close to interchange ramps (Martin Avenue at Marathon County NN)

### **Why build only three lanes in each direction on Highway 51/29 instead of four lanes?**

Current plans include three continuous lanes on the Highway 51/29 Corridor along with improvements to the local arterial system to provide for current and projected traffic volumes for the next 20 or 30 years.

The current design allows for the addition of a fourth continuous lane to accommodate future expansion if needed.

### **How much delay can I expect driving the Highway 51/29 corridor during construction?**

When crews resurfaced Highway 51/29 in 1999 travel lanes were limited to one lane in each direction. Traffic delays during peak commuter travel periods routinely exceeded 45 minutes and normal travel periods commonly experienced 10-minute delays.

During the 1999 resurfacing project, approximately 20 percent of the drivers that typically used the Highway 51/29 corridor elected to travel on the local arterials. If these drivers had not elected to use alternative routes, the travel delays would have been significantly longer.

Once construction is underway, to avoid 45-minute delays, two lanes of traffic in each direction need to be maintained and 30 percent of the traffic that typically uses the Highway 51/29 corridor will need to use alternative routes. The local arterial and interchange construction schedules will remove existing bottlenecks prior to the start of construction on mainline Highway 51/29.

WisDOT is developing a public information campaign to inform the communities of alternative routes to avoid travel delays.

### **Is my property impacted by this project, and if it is, when will the property be acquired?**

At this time, the impacts to individual properties are not currently defined. There are still many questions to be answered prior to finalizing the layout and construction schedule for the Highway 51/29 corridor and individual interchanges. A more detailed plan showing impacts to individual properties is expected in late 2002.

Acquisition of real estate is scheduled to begin in late 2002 or early 2003. Real estate acquisition typically begins one to two years prior to the scheduled construction year.

### **How will bicyclists and pedestrians cross the Highway 51/29 corridor?**

Increasing use of the local roadway system by bicyclists and pedestrians needs to be addressed early in the design process. Prior to determining how to accommodate this type of traffic across the Highway 51/29 corridor, bicycle and pedestrian routes need to be reviewed for the entire Wausau area. The Highway 51/29 Corridor Management Team will meet with local communities to discuss bicycle and pedestrian needs. Some of the questions that will be addressed are:

- What are the primary destinations for bicyclists and pedestrians?
- What are the current routes used by bicyclists and pedestrians?
- Are there safety issues that need to be addressed for current routes?
- What future routes are planned?
- How can we make these routes safer for bicyclists and pedestrians as they travel across the Highway 51/29 corridor?